Underwater squid light
Garry Smith | November 2003 | Area Articles / Queensland / Tropical North / Cairns |

Following a conversation with Tony Katsaros, our Townsville Fishtalk correspondent, I decided to have a go at making my own underwater squid light. For over 20 years I’ve used numerous types of above-water squid lights, varying from a kero pressure lamp to 12-volt car bulbs, but each has drawbacks – not the least being the effects of water splashed on a kero lamp. Bang goes another glass!

The one common problem with above-water squid lights is the reflection off the surface. If you make the shade cover too big, to reduce the reflection, it gets in the way of the scoop when you try to net the squid. It’s not such a problem when spearing, but if you do that you won’t have live squid for the likes of fingermark.

The thing that caught my attention from Tony’s conversation was using a bare bulb straight into the water and sealing it with silicone. The main thing to be careful of, according to Tony, is turning the light on in the air and then putting it underwater, because the hot bulb will crack. Tony also said you need to use a very low watt bulb, as too powerful a bulb throws too much light and the squid stay out of reach. With this skerrick of information, I set about my task.

My first stop was an auto store where I bought a 6-watt bulb (number plate and dash lamp – $5 for two). Next on the shopping list was a bayonet-mount single bulb socket ($4.50) to fit that size bulb. I re-used the tubing from my old squid light – two lengths of 45cm long 15mm PVC irrigation pipe (450x15mm Riser Poly Bsp – $2.15 ea.), a brass elbow ($4.50) and three joiners (female coupling – $1.21 ea.), which can all be found in most hardware or landscaping suppliers. I would have preferred to use a PVC elbow but when I purchased the material my local hardware store didn’t have any. The Riser Poly pipe comes in varying lengths, with threads on both ends so joiners and elbows can be used.

The bulb socket I chose fitted into the end of the irrigation pipe with a bit of trimming, so it could be completely covered with silicone. I used some tinned marine wiring (4mm dual cable – $2.35/m) because it’s far more resistant to saltwater intrusion. I wired up the bulb socket and then soldered the wire in place using self-fluxing soldering wire and one of those new butane pressure lighters. I passed the wire through the pipe and then screwed on the elbow, followed by the other pipe. The pipe lengths depend on the height of the sides of your boat and how you mount it to the boat.

Once the socket and bulb were tight in the end of the pipe I sealed it with silicone, using a wet finger to smooth it, covering the bottom half of the bulb. If the bulb was turned on in the air for a while I imagine the heat would affect the silicone seal, so I only turn it on underwater.

I screwed a coupling over the bulb so it could be wound down to cover and protect the bulb when not in use, then be wound up just far enough to expose the bottom half of the bulb, using the rim as a mini shade to stop light coming back into your eyes.

I fed the support length of Riser Poly pipe through a 15cm length of the next size up of standard PVC piping, pop-riveted to the front of my side console and with a 5mm wide piece cut longitudinally out of it so the power cord can slip in. The Riser pipe slides in to hold the light in place against the gunwale. The only problem has been in rough conditions when the wave action makes the light swing, and I stopped this by using a clamp on the support pipe. The light hangs down the side to just above the chine. Putting it below the chine would spread the light under the boat, leaving many of the squid out of reach. The bulb still pops out of the water occasionally when it’s rough but it hasn’t blown yet, so I guess that isn’t a problem.

Incidentally, I use outdoor 240 volt fittings in my boat, as I’ve found them to be far cheaper than marine fittings and far more reliable. I’ve had them in my Top Ender for five years and the only thing that’s gone so far is one plug, because water got inside and rusted the connections. I have since changed to clear plastic plugs (10 amp - $3.50) and sealed them with silicone, which has been excellent.

And there you have it – a ready-to-go squid light that’ll set you back only around $30.

1) The complete article. Note the 240v plug. INSET: The business end of the squid light with protective sleeve off.

2) The light hangs down the side to just above the chine. Putting it below the chine would spread the light under the boat leaving many of the squid out of reach. INSET: The cut PVC pipe used to hold the light in place.

3) Squid make great bait for many species.

Images